

# Hizb ut-Tahrir and Al-Muhajiroun: An Analysis of Extremist Islamist Groups and Their Relationships With Violence



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# Hizb ut-Tahrir and Al-Muhajiroun: An Analysis of Extremist Islamist Groups and Their Relationships With Violence



European  
Eye on  
Radicalization

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European Eye on Radicalization

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# Preface: Hizb ut-Tahrir UK: A Microcosm of Islamist Ideological Schizophrenia

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Hizb ut-Tahrir (HuT) across Europe and the United Kingdom have been key in popularising the concept of restoring an caliphate in the form of an Empire, but with modern ideas and constructs for their “Islamic State”, and even modern edicts justifying extreme violence.

The group Al-Muhajiroun—an offshoot of HuT—shares the same ideology and sees it manifest across the borders of Syria and Iraq in the so-called Islamic State (ISIS). Al-Muhajiroun was, alongside others across Europe, instrumental in sending thousands of young people to join ISIS over the last decade. Understanding this, and the ideological make-up of Al-Muhajiroun, is key to understanding the phenomenon of the “Islamic State”, an idea not found in the classical Islamic heritage. This can be seen both in its ideology, the failure to critique ISIS substantively, and its own attempts at seeking power through a jihadist militia in the Middle East.

This paper will outline the attempt at creating a modern organisation whilst holding onto pre-modern convictions and the resultant hybrid: a totalitarian movement informed by medieval readings of religious law, with the resultant schizophrenic ideology, and how this plays out for the group in the UK. The paper will also seek to assess the impact that external and internal debates have on communicating the ideology and activities of the organisation—and how this actually affects their message, not just how they wish to portray it.

HuT is an avowed ideological movement founded by Taqi al-Din al-Nabhani, a former Ba’thist, i.e. Arab national socialist.<sup>1</sup> It describes itself, and makes clear, that it is not a religious or priestly movement or preaching group. Instead, it defines itself as a political party. This is not in the traditional sense but, rather, an ideological group seeking to radically change the current status quo by establishing—or, in their mind at least, re-establishing—a caliphate or Islamic State, which are synonymous to them.<sup>2</sup> This self-perception and presentation aims at differentiating itself from other groups, social movements, and activists who see Islam as their inspiration. The purpose is to demonstrate that Islam, in its understanding, is more akin to Socialism and Communism than it is to Christianity or Judaism. In that respect, it seeks to create a modern identity. But, akin to other “total systems”—not totalitarian systems, a label the organisation seeks to avoid—Islam is not merely a religious belief or a provider of moral guidelines, but a foundation on which to build all economic and political systems, as well as constitutional principles and legislation. Hence, its defining characteristic is that it seeks to establish an Islamic State, with a unique constitution, laws, and governance structure based upon its reading of Islamic law or *shari’a*.<sup>3</sup>

This is where the tensions arise. Whilst the group seeks to define itself in a modern way, looking to provide meaning and substance to its ideology; political, economic, and constitutional systems of its own; and, an at-times singular, reading of both medieval *shari’a* and Imperial polities. This is manifest throughout the group’s ideas, activities, and strategic communication, and the presentation of its canonical or defined culture and literature.

The core canonical literature of the group shows this most emphatically. Before being allowed to officially join HuT, there is an indoctrination process, what they describe as their “culturing phase”, during which all members declare solemn oaths to the leadership of the group. The purpose is to ensure that every individual is part of the intellectual and emotional whole. The first text that is formally studied in this phase is entitled,

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<sup>1</sup> Suha Taji Farouki, *‘A Fundamental Quest’: Hizb Al-Tahrir and the Search for the Islamic Caliphate*, Grey Seal books, 1996, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> This description is according to the group, and does not reflect the author’s view. See the booklet issued by the group: *Hizb ut-Tahrir*, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> See the group’s publication, *Concepts of Hizb ut-Tahrir*, p. 76.

*The System of Islam*. This text seeks to demonstrate that Islam has all the characteristics that led to renaissance, enlightenment, and progress in Europe.

To do this, *The System of Islam* starts by explaining that “enlightened thinking” about the philosophy of life is actually what leads to progress. It then seeks to prove that the Islamic creed is based on such enlightened thinking. It shuns the notions of fate and destiny as understood in the medieval religious tradition, believing they hold back groups in society. Social structures are no longer destiny set by God; they are replaced with what HuT would describe as an active and motivational understanding. The next chapter then elaborately seeks to explain the Islamic value system as it perceives it, as not merely like Christian religion in medieval Europe preventing economic prosperity, and shunning material progress, but one which balanced spiritual, ethical, and humanitarian considerations with material values. The latter considerations serve to differentiate it from capitalism, which it views as giving no value other than the material, and Communism, which did not recognise the spiritual.

A whole chapter of *The System of Islam* explains how Islam is not against science and technology. It states that, far from suppressing free thinking in those spheres, it encourages these fields to flourish, and the group presents their own version of David Hume’s “guillotine of objective and subjective ideas”, i.e. scientific ideas and cultural value systems, which they borrowed from a secularist, Arab thinker, Sati al-Husri.<sup>4</sup> According to HuT, these scientific and cultural aspects should be purely Islamic. This contradiction between modernity and medievalism can be seen in the chapter on constitutions and canons that define the legitimacy of a constitution, one that is the basis of State Law. Hence, HuT suggests it can restrict and control government—in this case that of the Caliph—through the modern device of the constitution, as Europe had done with its monarchies. In fact, when explaining this in a work devoted to explaining the ethos of a constitution, HuT argues that Caliphs in this religious State should not enforce a specific sectarian understanding of Islam, since that was tried and led to conflicts, such as the infamous *mihna*,<sup>5</sup> the trial of Muslim scholars during the early Abbasid period when the Caliphs tried to enforce the Mutazili tradition over the entirety of Muslimdom.<sup>6</sup> This led to the persecution of scholars that did not adopt the official State dogma in a manner that could be analogised to the European wars during the pre-Reformation period.

The goes on to produce an elaborate constitution aimed at demonstrating the thoroughly modern nature of the Islamic State it seeks to build, and its ability to deal with modern problems of all types. Yet its perspective is informed more by medieval political readings of the Abbasid political structure than a formal reading of rulings on governance in Islamic literature. It even develops an entirely modern elected parliamentary system, which has no historic precedent, and attempts to use medieval jurisprudence to justify this—manifesting the tension of its modernist-medievalist contradiction. Finally, *The System of Islam* ends with a chapter downplaying morals within Islam as being a real branch of Islamic sciences.<sup>7</sup> This last contention—one that was specifically to distinguish it from the Muslim Brotherhood—is one that many Muslims find difficult to accept.

These overtures to modernity, however, become eclipsed by the group’s insistence on particular interpretations of Islam and Islamic law, which are to be enforced through the State. These include, but are not restricted to, an insistence on rejecting the modern forms of financial corporations, and the imposition of

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<sup>4</sup> Charif, Maher, *Rihanat al-nahda fi'l-fikr al-'arabi*, Damascus, Dar al-Mada, 2000, pp. 204-05.

<sup>5</sup> For a brief description of the mihna, [see here](#).

<sup>6</sup> “Muslimdom” was coined by Bernard Lewis in his *The Crisis of Islam* (2002) to describe the pre-modern Muslim alternative to Christendom.

<sup>7</sup> See the Hizb ut-Tahrir publication, [The System of Islam](#).

strict punitive punishments for what they define as criminal behaviour, including the death penalty for apostasy, which, according to their understanding of Islamic beliefs,<sup>8</sup> includes the embrace of democracy.<sup>9</sup>

That said, while HuT sets out a constitution for the Caliph, it is stated within it, that it is permitted to adopt and change the constitution, and all interpretations of the shari'a! This includes the selection and removal of judges and all those holding positions of political authority. Indeed, they define the State as *being* the Caliph and detail these provisions, including killing apostates and the rights and duties of the Caliph in their book, *The Islamic State*, where they also define their methodology in seeking power.<sup>10</sup> This is done through a hybrid and anachronistic reading of the Prophetic biography, coupled with a Ba'thist methodology for ideological change to achieve this State ruled by one Caliph.<sup>11</sup>

In HuT's view, this would create an absolute dictatorship modelled on the historic Empire of the Abbasids.<sup>12</sup> In reality, what they propose is totalitarian in nature, more like the totalitarian manifestations of modernity that were beginning to take shape in the middle of the nineteenth century, not the Abbasid polity that lasted from the eighth to the thirteenth centuries. HuT's Islamic State most closely resembles Soviet Communism and Fascism, which can be argued to be at odds with the Enlightenment values of modernity, but were also far from pre-modern notions of polity, religious and legal pluralism, communal law, and judicial separation from polity, as understood in pre-modern and medieval Islamic thought.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, this hybrid ideology creates a type of schizophrenia that manifests not only throughout the group's views and ideas as expressed internally, but also in HuT's communication of its ideology. This impacts the group as a whole and its various branches. In the UK, this manifests in an exaggerated manner, with HuT's members having to operate in the intellectual and political atmosphere of a state at the heart of the West.

— Rashad Ali, a Resident Senior Fellow at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD)

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<sup>8</sup> See the constitution in either the Islamic State or the System of Islam for the group's view on apostasy. They also issued a book entitled *The Penal Code*, authored by Abdul Rahman Maliki and published by their publishing house Dar ul-Ummah in Beirut, which discussed the punishments for adultery, homosexuality, and other "crimes".

<sup>9</sup> Another aspect of the inconsistency was that the Ottoman Empire or sultanate was constantly referred to as the last Caliphate, up to its end in 1924, and was considered an Islamic State, despite the removal of penal codes and *hudud* laws, and the adoption of legal canons from Europe. See: [The Tanzimat: Secular Reforms in the Ottoman Empire](#).

<sup>10</sup> See the constitution in the Hizb ut-Tahrir publication, [The Islamic State](#).

<sup>11</sup> Many authors have pointed out that Nabhani, the founder of HuT was a Ba'thist i.e. an Arab Socialist, and brought in many of their revolutionary ideals. This is the central thesis of Dr Suha Taji Farouki in her ground-breaking work, *A Fundamental Quest*.

<sup>12</sup> See Hizb ut-Tahrir publication, [The Ruling System of Islam](#), which is based on the work of the Abbasid qadi Abu'l Hasan al-Mawardi 'Ahkam al-Sultaniya. It details the structure of the Abbasid ruling Empire that HuT takes as its model for government and frequently cite in their own writings.

<sup>13</sup> For an elaborate discussion on this, see: Sherman A. Jackson, 'Legal Pluralism Between Islam and the Nation-State: Romantic Medievalism or Pragmatic Modernity?', *Fordham International Law Journal*, 2006. [Available here](#).



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# Introduction

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In August 2022, the author Salman Rushdie was attacked and stabbed as he was about to deliver a lecture in New York. Most notably with his novel *The Satanic Verses* written in 1988, Rushdie has garnered criticism and widespread backlash from the global Muslim community for his seemingly negative and offensive depiction of the Prophet Muhammed. The backlash escalated in the following year, when Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Iran's religious and political leader, issued a fatwa (a legitimate edict from a religious leader) calling for Rushdie and anyone associated with the book to be killed. This triggered acts of violence around the world and Rushdie had to live in hiding for many years. The assassination attempt against Rushdie in 2022 was an attempt to implement the fatwa.

Following this attack, many Muslim voices have re-ignited the conversations surrounding Rushdie's work. Dr. Abdul Wahid, Chairman of Hizb ut-Tahrir Britain, commented in an article that Rushdie has been used as a figure for the West to attempt to Westernise and secularise Muslims, as well as to attack Islam as standing against free speech and promoting violence. In terms of the fatwa declared against Rushdie, Wahid stated that while he did not agree with the violence committed against Rushdie as a result, he understood why Muslims were protesting; they viewed his 1988 novel as an attack on his roots, like a "knife into the hearts of hundreds of millions of Muslims", selling out to Western liberals.<sup>14</sup> As a leading figure of Hizb ut-Tahrir, Wahid's stance mirrors the larger organisation's view on the use of violence and the activities that they organise in pursuit of establishing a global caliphate.<sup>15</sup>

In contrast, there are Muslims who embrace the violence that the fatwa against Rushdie would involve. Al-Muhajiroun, an offshoot Islamist extremist network from Hizb ut-Tahrir, would go further in promoting teachings that justify the use of force to achieve a global caliphate.

The recent attack on Rushdie re-focuses the question of what the views of extremist groups like Hizb ut-Tahrir and Al-Muhajiroun are, and what they are prepared to do to achieve their aims. This paper looks at these two groups, analysing their relationships to violence, both historically and in contemporary contexts.

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<sup>14</sup> Abdul Wahid, 'Salman Rushdie, The Satanic Verses and the Crusade Against Islam', [5Pillars](#) [online], 2022.

<sup>15</sup> Wahid, 2022.

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# Hizb ut-Tahrir

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## *What is Hizb ut-Tahrir?*

Hizb ut-Tahrir (HuT) is an international Islamist extremist group that boasts an international following. With branches established in what they call the “Muslim lands” of Asia and North Africa, as well as in the West, including in the United Kingdom (U.K.). HuT define themselves as a political party rather than an organisation, with their view that society should function on the foundation of Islam, in a manner usually compared with political ideologies like capitalism and communism, rather than as a religion.<sup>16</sup>

The aim of HuT is to establish one global Islamic State or caliphate (*Khilafa*) in which its functioning is based on Islamic law (*shari'a*) and Islamic principles in all areas of life, including appointing a leader, the Caliph, to rule over both Muslims and non-Muslims. To achieve this, the party believes it must follow the peaceful methods of the Prophet Muhammed; intellectual enlightening of the global Muslim community (*umma*), persuasion of un-believers (non-Muslims), and creating a domino effect of thought changes that translate into the establishment of a global Khilafa. HuT asserts itself as the only party that the umma can embrace as it follows the *seera* (life or biography) of Muhammad with no deviation, using an established and proven method.<sup>17</sup>

Due to HuT's belief in the use of Islam as a foundation for societal governance, the party rejects Western concepts such as democracy and free speech, meaning that they do not participate in democratic processes or engage with other non-Islamic political parties. Despite following the peaceful methods of Prophet Muhammed and holding a generally non-violent position, HuT has a complicated history with a passive nature towards and the use of violence, which will be discussed in the following section.

## *Relationship to Violence*

The role of force and violence within HuT paints a picture of a group that is not willing to use violence themselves but may not always condemn the violence of outsiders and sympathisers in the name of similar causes to what the party is striving towards. Since its founding, HuT has been a decisively non-violent organisation, yet some historical events involving the activities of HuT members have challenged this narrative.

In the twentieth century, HuT was repeatedly at the centre of allegations of military coup attempts in various Muslim-majority countries, including in Syria and Egypt, although the accounts are widely disputed. One example that can be looked to here is Jordan. In the 1960s, the party had picked up wide popular support from the population, despite being denied legal registration by the Jordanian authorities. In 1968, the HuT leadership had decided that it had enough members that a serious coup attempt could be made not only in Jordan, but also in Iraq, with the help of small groups of military forces in each country.<sup>18</sup> Ultimately this attempt, along with various rumoured plots to assassinate former King Husayn of Jordan (r. 1952-1999), were unsuccessful. Since then, members have been arrested, prosecuted, and found guilty of affiliation in coup attempts throughout the following decades.<sup>19</sup>

Looking at the contemporary HuT, the party's ideology is focussed on spreading the message of Islam (*da'wa*), enlightening the umma and persuading non-believers. As a result, the activities of HuT are centred around

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<sup>16</sup> Hizb ut-Tahrir, *Hizb ut-Tahrir*, London, U.K.: Al-Khilafa Publications, 1996, p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> Hizb ut-Tahrir, 1996.

<sup>18</sup> International Crisis Group, *Radical Islam in Central Asia: Responding to Hizb ut-Tahrir*, Brussels, Belgium: ICG, 2003.

<sup>19</sup> International Crisis Group, 2003.



open conversations and discussions through the mediums of study circles, talks, lectures, and demonstrations. While the party may be considered extremist in its views, since it rejects democracy and calls for shari'a, its activities are non-violent in nature. This is not to say, however, that these discussions cannot encourage members to take things further. Coup attempts in the 2010s have been linked to HuT in various countries, one such example being in Bangladesh. In January 2012, the Bangladesh military claimed to have arrested thirteen individuals in connection with plotting a coup to overthrow the government.<sup>20</sup> These individuals were identified as being military personnel who were described as being “religiously fanatic” and having links to HuT.<sup>21</sup> Similarly in 2011, intelligence services in Pakistan stated that they had caught onto HuT activity focussed on planning a coup through the use of sympathetic army officers, five of whom were arrested.<sup>22</sup> Even though the number of arrests are extremely small compared to the masses that would be required to instigate and successfully execute a military coup, it demonstrates HuT’s ideology in action (discussed below). It also demonstrates the fact that HuT may be actively recruiting military personnel to try to overthrow regimes that are perceived as sympathetic to Western interests and in aid of building the global Muslim caliphate.<sup>23</sup> This is also evident in HuT’s Pakistan manifesto, in which the party argues that Pakistan is still subservient to colonial powers and therefore must free itself—i.e., be taken over by HuT—to achieve its potential for the Muslim world.<sup>24</sup>

While the violence of a military coup may appear to go against the non-violent HuT position, the party’s ideology contains justification for these actions in some cases. The basis of HuT’s mission is the intellectual strengthening of the umma and persuading outsiders of the importance of their aim to establish an Islamic State. In theory, this would be done peacefully, as HuT expects to be swept to power by a mass change in thought, and once the newly established caliphate will cause people to convert to Islam and work for the further expansion of the global caliphate—a sort of domino effect. However, if this takeover cannot be done voluntarily and peacefully, then the party argues that they must win the support of influential people, like military personnel of the existing disbelieving (*kufir*) government.<sup>25</sup> As HuT openly reject democracy and democratic processes, there is no other way for them to seize power—if peaceful methods fail—other than taking it by force, using supporters from within the military to enact their wishes. By HuT actively seeking the membership of military personnel in cases like those presented above, it may imply they are willing to let the military carry out the violence for them, as a certain degree of force would be necessary even in the most peaceful of coup attempts.<sup>26</sup> In order to remove evil (*munkar*), the party allows the use of force so long as it does not lead to severe unrest (*fitna*).<sup>27</sup> In the case of using force to remove a ruler, the party’s methodology states that using arms to do this is only allowed in the case that they show clear kufr.<sup>28</sup> On the whole, despite the stance of purported non-violence, the group’s ideology provides enough loopholes where force is justified as necessary for the sake of the Islamic State, that it makes clear the party’s support of violence is not consistent and unequivocal, but conditional.

While there are ideological justifications for violence within HuT, there is evidence of internal debates and conflicts, too. HuT itself may criticise others for their stance on violence and not following what they see as the proper methods, such as *nusra* (“support” or “victory”, depending on context) and da’wa, however it has problems of its own concerning internal divisions. The party has a focus on gaining the following of the global umma in its mission to create the global Islamic state. However, splinter groups have emerged outside of HuT

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<sup>20</sup> ‘Military Claims to Have Thwarted Coup Attempt in Bangladesh’, [IHS](#) [online], 2012.

<sup>21</sup> IHS, 2012.

<sup>22</sup> IHS, 2012.

<sup>23</sup> Hizb ut-Tahrir, ‘Senior Pakistani Army Officers Detained for Suspected Links with Banned Islamist Group’, [Al-Khilafa Publications](#) [online], 2011; Hizb ut-Tahrir, ‘Open Letter of Hizb ut Tahrir Wilayah Pakistan to the Security Services and Judiciary’, [The Khalifah](#) [online], 2015.

<sup>24</sup> Hizb ut-Tahrir, *Manifesto of Hizb ut-Tahrir for Pakistan*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Pakistan: The Khilafa Publishers, 2013, p. 38.

<sup>25</sup> Hizb ut-Tahrir, *The Methodology of Hizb ut-Tahrir for Change*, London, U.K.: [Al-Khilafa Publications](#), 1999, pp. 18-19.

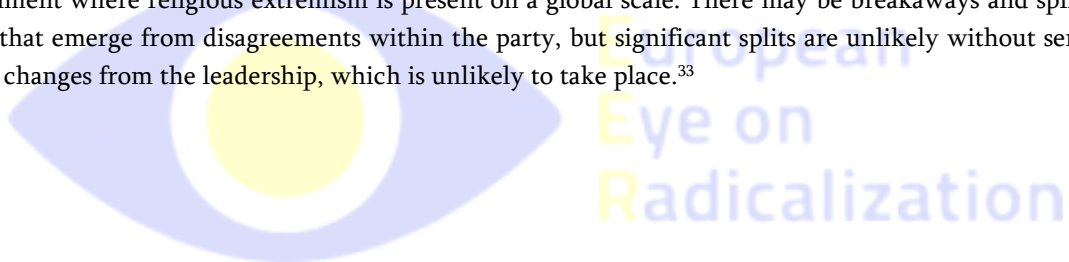
<sup>26</sup> Imtiaz Ahmad, ‘Pak busts jihadi coup plot’, [Hindustan Times](#) [online], 2011.

<sup>27</sup> Hizb ut-Tahrir, 1999, p. 19.

<sup>28</sup> Hizb ut-Tahrir, 1999, pp. 19-20.

that emphasise a focus on smaller scale community-based development instead of the global approach. For example, in 1996, former HuT member Akram Yuldashev founded Akramiyya, a group that operated in the Ferghana Valley in Uzbekistan to create economic and agricultural ties between residents to rebuild communities while retaining the emphasis on an intellectually based struggle similar to HuT.<sup>29</sup> In the same way, in 1999, former HuT members in Uzbekistan set up Hizb-an-Nusra (Party of Victory) as they were unsatisfied with HUT's propaganda method of political struggle and may have been ready for more violent methods.<sup>30</sup>

Shown here are numerous reasons why members have disagreed with HuT's central leadership and approaches, however it appears to be more about disagreeing with the methodology of establishing caliphate or the struggle to change non-Muslim thoughts. It is important to point out here that HuT members are extremely loyal and few leave once they have joined. If a member leaves or breaks their oath to the party, they will be expelled very quickly.<sup>31</sup> As said before, the group does not officially support the use of violence, but there is a clear tension that can be identified between those who are turning to violence and those who remain loyal to the classical view of Taqi al-Din al-Nabhani, the group's founder. The classical HuT belief in a peaceful battle against the so-called enemies of Islam is being strained because of the increased presence of religious terrorism in the post-9/11 world. Members have been arrested for endorsing the violence used by the Islamic State (ISIS) to establish their self-declared Islamic caliphate.<sup>32</sup> This, along with the party's history of involvement with military coups, shows the fine line between the party's classical ideology and the modern environment where religious extremism is present on a global scale. There may be breakaways and splinter groups that emerge from disagreements within the party, but significant splits are unlikely without serious tactical changes from the leadership, which is unlikely to take place.<sup>33</sup>



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<sup>29</sup> International Crisis Group, 2003, p. 29.

<sup>30</sup> International Crisis Group, 2003, p. 29.

<sup>31</sup> International Crisis Group, 2003, p. 30.

<sup>32</sup> 'NIA Charges Hizb ut-Tahrir Member With Promoting ISIS In India', *Economic Times* [online], 2021.

<sup>33</sup> International Crisis Group, 2003, p. 30.

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## Hizb ut-Tahrir in Syria

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As documented in the first section, HuT has a presence that spans many countries. An important case study is Syria. They have been operational in the country since 1953, with the government deporting the party's founder, Al-Nabhani, to Lebanon.<sup>34</sup> One other notable country where HuT have had a presence is Afghanistan, but the movement there is much newer and focussed on educational spaces for encouraging discussion and promoting propaganda (see Appendix A).

Looking to Syria, the party was a sign of hope for educated Muslim youth who were dissatisfied with the Muslim Brotherhood that was in the government at the time. Activities of the party, including meetings, group discussions, and hosting visits from Al-Nabhani to various Syrian cities provoked the Brotherhood, prompting authorities to monitor activities and members for decades.<sup>35</sup>

There have been various arrest campaigns since the 1950s, with members of the party having regularly made up a number of the domestic prisoner population, however the influence of the civil war since 2011 has obviously affected this. The party's presence and methods of operation have adapted to the ongoing conflict, which initially pitted pro-government and Iranian forces supporting Bashar al-Assad's regime against rebel groups, and has since morphed to include the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), the Islamic State (ISIS), and external great power actors.

Since the beginning of the war, HuT Syria has supported the rebellion as a legitimate revolution, seeing an opportunity for the establishment of an Islamic state by toppling the Assad regime, which commits "criminality in full view of the world", referring to the revolution almost as a manifestation of Allah.<sup>36</sup> The party has also called for the Muslim umma to support those fighting Assad and help institute Islam as a governance system in Bilad al-Sham (lit. "the Land of Syria") or "Islamic Syria", a territory covering the entire Levant: modern Syria, Lebanon, Israel, the Palestinian Territories, Jordan, and sections of eastern Iraq and southern Turkey. Furthermore, the revolution has provided an opportunity for HuT to organise on a larger scale due to the preoccupation of government authorities with fighting rebel groups. As a result, HuT have been able to establish offices in cities outside of government control, giving them the capacity to distribute leaflets and books—including *Al-Wa'l* magazine—and perform wider da'wa in different communities.<sup>37</sup>

While HuT does believe that Assad is Allah's enemy and supports the actions of anti-government rebel groups, it is important to point out that there are distinctions in the kinds of support offered towards the various types of rebel groups.

### ***Hizb ut-Tahrir's Support for the Syrian Jihad***

To understand the variations in HuT support for rebel groups, the different types of existing groups should be laid out. Within the numbers of rebel groups, there are various Islamic-oriented fronts, some more extreme in their views than others, and some being identified as jihadist (believing in the struggle to establish Islamist rule through violence).

One of these umbrellas was the Syrian Islamic Liberation Front (SILF), created in 2012, which effectively broke up soon after due to the withdrawal of two main groups to form another front. The groups under this

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<sup>34</sup> Tariq Ahmed, 'Hizb ut-Tahrir in the Syrian Revolution', *Suwar* [online], 2016.

<sup>35</sup> Ahmed, 2016.

<sup>36</sup> Hizb ut-Tahrir, 'The Ordeal in Syria Intensifies: The Rebels Remain Patient and Steadfast and Are Determined to Establish the Rightly Guided Khilafa State', *Hizb ut-Tahrir* [online], 2011b.

<sup>37</sup> Ahmed, 2016.

umbrella name ranged from moderate Islamists to extreme conservative Salafists, but they worked together in the name of establishing an Islamic state.<sup>38</sup>

Next, there was the Islamic Front was founded in 2013, consisting of seven Islamist groups representing the various Syrian regions. This movement did not formally include the main Syrian Al-Qaeda affiliate, Jabhat al-Nusra, or any other Al-Qaeda affiliates, but did allow foreign fighters in the name of broad cooperation in the anti-Assad struggle, and did include Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya, a militant Salafi group that cooperated closely with Al-Nusra. The front also included the most powerful group in southern Syria, Jaysh al-Islam, a member of the so-called “quietest” Salafist trend, *Salafiyya Ilmiyya* (scholarly Salafism), which fought ISIS tenaciously and at times clashed with Al-Nusra as well, plus smaller, more moderate Islamist groups like Suqour al-Sham, Liwa al-Haq, and the Kurdish Islamic Front.<sup>39</sup>

Finally, there was Jabhat al-Nusra itself, now known as the Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), established initially in Syria as a front for ISIS that split with its parent organisation and pledged allegiance to Al-Qaeda in 2013, after it had become one of the largest and most powerful insurgent forces, and had been accused of carrying out various terrorist attacks in the country.<sup>40</sup> In the summer of 2016, Al-Nusra rebranded as Jabhat Fatah al-Sham (JFS) and announced it had cut ties to Al-Qaeda.<sup>41</sup> This was a ruse.<sup>42</sup> In January 2017, JFS orchestrated a merger—more like a hostile takeover—with other Islamist groups, and has in the years since reiterated that they are independent of Al-Qaeda.<sup>43</sup> HuT has never supported Al-Nusra at any point in this evolution.

Within the Syrian insurgent landscape, then, HuT has withheld support for overt jihadi-Salafist groups. Nonetheless, HuT has lent support to groups engaged in violent activity. It is important to note that the groups HuT has supported have overwhelmingly launched attacks against military targets. However, the point still stands that this highlights HuT’s complicated relationship with violence.

So, there must be some justification provided by HuT for why they would be able to support groups like this? The ideology of the party, again, holds the key to understanding why HuT can support such organisations— if not necessarily every action, the cause they are fighting in the name of. One of the biggest aspects of the party’s ideology is the need to establish the Khilafa. According to HuT, it is a sin to neglect any work towards establishing this, as Allah has obliged all Muslims to restrict themselves to the rule of shari’a, which is not possible without an Islamic state where these rules are imposed over all.<sup>44</sup> This is arguably the most important aspect and goal of HuT, and so to have groups like those described above who are fighting to establish Syria as an Islamic state is something that the party must support. Creating this Islamic state must begin with da’wa in existing Muslim-majority countries, and these groups are attempting to do this by spreading the message of Islam through the taking up of arms. In this sense, the ends justify the means.

In addition, HuT could also justify support for Syrian jihad through its argument that the force is necessary to win the struggle against non-Muslim ideologies. The party believes that it is the duty of all Muslims to work to change their countries from Dar-al Kufr, land where non-believer laws are implemented even if citizens are Muslim, to Dar-al Islam, land where shari’a is implemented even if citizens are non-Muslim.<sup>45</sup> As part of this, the party describes jihad, the struggle of all Muslims, as originally “*fard kifayah*”, referring to the collective duty to be fulfilled by sufficient numbers of Muslims.<sup>46</sup> The jihadist groups represent those numbers required in the struggle against non-believers, fighting the enemy even if they did not start fighting first. Contemporary Islamic interpretations of these teachings would see this as defensive warfare, however HuT

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<sup>38</sup> ‘Guide to the Syrian rebels’, *BBC News* [online], 2013.

<sup>39</sup> BBC News, 2013.

<sup>40</sup> BBC News, 2013.

<sup>41</sup> CSIS, ‘Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS): TNT Terrorism Backgrounder’, *Centre for Strategic and International Studies* (CSIS) [online], 2018.

<sup>42</sup> Hassan Hassan, ‘Jabhat Al Nusra and Al Qaeda: The Riddle, the Ruse, and the Reality’, *The National* [online], 2017.

<sup>43</sup> CSIS, 2018.

<sup>44</sup> Hizb ut-Tahrir, 1996 pp. 6 & 37.

<sup>45</sup> Hizb ut-Tahrir, 1996 p. 37.

<sup>46</sup> Hizb ut-Tahrir, 1996 p. 37.

states that it is not. Rather, it is a compulsory war to raise the word of Allah.<sup>47</sup> HuT could also support Islamist groups in Syria due to their rebellion against what they see as a kufr tyrant (Assad).<sup>48</sup> Assad has ruled in kufr over a Muslim majority country by committing acts of violence against his own population, thus neglecting in his duty to protect them, and therefore must be removed from power. As well as these groups fighting Assad, HuT states that other Muslim countries in the Muslim world, like Turkey and Jordan, should extend weapons and men to the rebels as they are obliged to help their brothers and fellow Muslims.<sup>49</sup> This would also be done to ensure the victory of Islamists and prevent the intervention of “colonial” Western powers like the U.S. to replace one tyrant with another, as HuT perceives it.

### ***Why Hizb ut-Tahrir’ Retains a Formal Prohibition on Violence***

Given HuT’s support for Syrian Islamist rebels, it raises the question of why it has retained its ideology and methodology that eschews violence. What is the point of remaining formally one step removed from the actions of a violent revolt HuT clearly supports in Syria? The answer lies in overlapping ideological-political and practical considerations.

The party’s general adoption of non-violence has required a very fine line to be walked between its non-violent activities and its endorsement of the violent actions of other actors. Syria provides a special case. On the one hand, while HuT only at this point supports the use of force in very limited circumstances, one of those circumstances is removing a kufr leader, and by HuT lights Assad certainly qualifies. On the other hand, within HuT ideology, it is believed that only the Caliph (leader of the Khilafa) can decide whether to adopt violence or not for a political struggle. As such, for HuT to declare that the violence used by Syrian Islamists was *not* necessary would be to overstep their bounds and break rules that they established for their vision of how the Khilafa would function.<sup>50</sup>

Another ideological-political factor is that if HuT deviated from any part of its methodology, ideology, or strategy, it would damage their credibility to their followers and affect their image as the party that has not changed their approach since its inception in the 1950s. The commitment to non-violence makes HuT distinct from other Salafi and Islamist extremist groups, offering a different vision for how radical Muslims can advance the cause of the global umma and the caliphate. As HuT has argued that this approach is in line with the will of God, while violence is not, changing their approach now would alienate followers and create cascading questions that would not only be deleterious to the image of the group, but potentially unravel it.

Finally, there is a more practical issue. If HuT deviated from its non-violent stance, it could push more governments to proscribe them, given their existing extreme views, and could inspire grassroots violence from its followers that would provide justification for these and worse crackdowns.

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<sup>47</sup> Hizb ut-Tahrir, 1996, p. 37.

<sup>48</sup> Ahmed, 2016.

<sup>49</sup> Hizb ut-Tahrir, 1999.

<sup>50</sup> Emmanuel Karagiannis & Clark McCauley, ‘Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami: Evaluating the Threat Posed By a Radical Islamic Group That Remains Non-Violent’, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 2006, Volume 18, Issue 2, p. 325.

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# Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Islamic State

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ISIS's intrusion into the Syrian civil war created numerous problems, one of which was an ideological challenge to other Islamists after ISIS declared that they had successfully established an Islamic caliphate in June 2014, which was not merely theoretical: they actually controlled large swathes of territory in Syria and Iraq. ISIS became globally infamous for their brutality towards those they viewed as enemies, including all other Islamists, Al-Qaeda included; their savage treatment of civilians under their control; and a global terrorist campaign that struck most major cities in Europe and Britain.

HuT took a definitive stance against ISIS, having stated that the group tarnished the mission for a caliphate by creating an image of jihad that was unfavourable for more peaceful Islamist movements. Non-violent organisations that shared the goal of establishing a caliphate but pursued it peacefully were being grouped together with ISIS.

The shared desire to establish a caliphate is about as much as HuT and ISIS have in common. The divergence is particularly apparent in their methodologies. HuT does not support outright violence in the pursuit of the caliphate, relying more on the persuasion of outsiders about their mission, following what they see as the example of the Prophet Muhammad. In 2014, HuT released a statement calling ISIS a "militia" and its pledge to expand its self-declared caliphate as being "empty" due to the use of violence to achieve this.<sup>51</sup> From the perspective of a non-Muslim with no understanding of Islamic teachings, the idea of establishing a Muslim caliphate became synonymous with the brutality and terror of ISIS, creating an image of a state built on repression and suffering, and which posed a threat to non-Muslims.

HuT's denouncement of ISIS was both a methodological and tactical move, to protect itself and its reputation.

It was methodological because ISIS methods for creating the caliphate do not align with those of HuT, as stated above. HuT emphasises the importance of "nusra", seeking help from outside the Muslim community, specifically gaining support from influential figures to trigger a peaceful transition of power. Furthermore, the da'wa carried out by HuT aims to change the thoughts of non-Muslims to become Islam-oriented, creating consensus for the adoption of Islam as the societal foundation for existing non-Muslim states.<sup>52</sup> HuT do not practice or call for imposing a caliphate from the top-down through violence as ISIS does, favouring instead a bottom-up process of intellectual heightening and spreading the party's ideas throughout wider society.<sup>53</sup>

Similarly, the denouncement of ISIS was a tactical move by HuT to distance themselves from a group with whom their ideas and intentions were being entangled. Creating distance by condemning ISIS's methods was an obvious, and really the only, option to maintain the party's non-violent image, in turn making it clear to governments that HuT and ISIS were not cooperating. HuT has faced calls for it to be banned many times before, so condemning ISIS and differentiating themselves was a step HuT could take to make sure they were not proscribed like other groups, such as Al Muhajiroun, whose leaders encouraged support for ISIS.

This tactical move was not directed only at external audiences. HuT is not democratic and does not believe in democratic methods, but it does have a certain level of engagement with communities, through events and gatherings, and to avoid alienating its own loyalists, as well as putting off prospective sympathisers and recruits, the party needed to signal it had no links to the violence of ISIS.

For these reasons, it made both methodological and tactical sense for HuT to denounce ISIS, rather than remain silent and appear indifferent or potentially supportive of the actions of the violent jihadist group.

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<sup>51</sup> Hizb ut-Tahrir, 'Media Statement Regarding ISIS's Declaration in Iraq', [Hizb ut-Tahrir Britain](#) [online], 2014.

<sup>52</sup> Hizb ut-Tahrir, 1999, pp. 24-25.

<sup>53</sup> Susanne Olson, 'Hizb ut-Tahrir's Caliphical Counternarrative', *Religions*, 2021, Volume 12, Issue 18, p. 5.



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# Al-Muhajiroun

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## *What is Al-Muhajiroun?*

Al-Muhajiroun (ALM) was an Islamist group founded in the U.K. in 1996. Its founder, Omar Bakri Mohammed, was a former member and leader of HuT from 1986 to 1995 and became a prominent figure of Islamist extremism in the U.K. in the 1990s and 2000s.

As an offshoot of HuT, ALM's ideology was very similar to that of HuT. They wanted to establish a Khilafa where the shari'a was instituted over every citizen and intended to replace capitalism with Islam in all areas of life.<sup>54</sup> While Bakri also followed HuT's stance on non-violence, there are many examples where he and other members have argued for the legitimacy of violent acts committed in the name of Islam, such as the terrorist massacre of 9/11.<sup>55</sup> In this regard, the group was more open and sympathetic in their justifications of violence performed by others, and became known for their more extremist comments on this.

In 2004, ALM faced calls for a ban, so to avoid proscription by the U.K. government, Bakri dissolved ALM. Despite this, the group has re-emerged several times under various different names, however the government has proscribed almost all variations and offshoots of ALM in every instance. For example, Al-Ghurabaa was created in 2005 but proscribed the following year. In 2008, Anjem Choudary, one of the most prominent and well-known members of ALM, established Islam4UK to continue operations, as well as other offshoot organisations like the Saved Sect, all of which were proscribed under the Terrorism Act.<sup>56</sup> Other proscribed aliases for the group include Muslim Against Crusades (2010/11), Need4Khilafa, and the Sharia Project (2014).<sup>57</sup> On the whole, ALM has shown resilience and its ideology was significant in influencing Islamist extremism in the U.K..

## *Internal Conflicts Concerning Jihad*

Particularly potent within ALM was the complicated stance on violent jihad. The ideas of ALM were not as clear-cut as its leaders insisted. There were many contradictions between factions on the justifications of violence within the group, and while ALM always made sure to remain legal in its activities and statements, there were many competing voices on how far to justify violent jihad before the group was dissolved in its original formation in 2004.<sup>58</sup>

One main strand of thought was fully sympathetic to violent jihadist groups like Al-Qaeda. There were statements made on behalf of the group that showed what appeared to be full support for the use of terrorism. In one quote, ALM members referred to the 9/11 hijackers as the "Magnificent Nineteen", glorifying their atrocity on 11 September 2001 and declaring that while they rejected having any ties with the group, they would be proud to be associated with Al-Qaeda.<sup>59</sup> Declarations such as these always remained technically just short of endorsing the activities of terrorist organisations, but it was clear that ALM members sympathised with what groups like Al-Qaeda were doing. The language used was carefully chosen so to keep the group from being proscribed.

The ideological justification for this sympathetic view of violent jihad presented a very much black-and-white view of the world. The belief in a clash of civilisations between Dar al-Islam (Abode of Islam) and Dar al-Kufr (Abode of Disbelievers) was at the centre of this unwavering sympathy towards Al-Qaeda. Members

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<sup>54</sup> Omar Bakri Mohammed, 'Biography: No Friend of Caesar', [High Profiles](#) [online], 2003.

<sup>55</sup> Bakri Mohammed, 2003.

<sup>56</sup> Home Office, 'Policy Paper: Proscribed Terrorist Groups or Organisations', [U.K. Government](#) [online], 2021.

<sup>57</sup> Home Office, 2021.

<sup>58</sup> Home Office, 2021.

<sup>59</sup> Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, *Narratives of Division: The Spectrum of Islamist Worldviews in the U.K.*, London, U.K.: TBIGC, 2019, p. 24.

of ALM following this path believed in the notion that nothing a Muslim did against a non-Muslim could be condemned as they are innocent and victims of oppression, meaning that they justified the violence of 9/11 as retaliation for alleged centuries of violence committed upon them and their religion.<sup>60</sup>

The second strand of thought about jihad was that there could be conditional support for terrorism outside one's own country. This is the strand that the ALM leader Bakri was a part of. ALM believed that all Muslims are required to take up arms to spread the message of Islam and defend its lands. According to Bakri, "if the U.S. continues with her policy against Islam and the Muslim world, Muslims will be more inclined to strike blows against America".<sup>61</sup> Demonstrated here is Bakri's framing of jihadist violence as a backlash to America's apparent negative treatment of Muslims in the states of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). This dynamic was referred to as the plight of Muslim nations, and, in theory, once the oppression stopped, so would the attacks. Bakri's interpretation of what this meant can be seen in his on-the-record statement that 9/11 was "a great day to remember, not to mourn but to learn lessons", and, again, he is far from the only ALM member to consider the 9/11 massacre as legitimate.<sup>62</sup> While not outrightly supporting any acts of terrorism to be carried out in the U.K., Bakri and other ALM members did not hide their support for terrorism against the West in other countries. In 1999, ALM released the Islamic Truth leaflet urging followers to travel to Chechnya to wage jihad against Russia, demonstrating again that many members in the organisation were supportive of violence outside the U.K..<sup>63</sup>

The last strand of thought concerning jihad in ALM was the absolute rejection of terrorism as a tactical and differentiating material means of jihad. This is the closest that the group came to being non-violent in its statements concerning terrorist groups. The justification behind this referred to the so-called covenant of security, in which Muslims living in non-Muslim countries that allow open practice of their faith should not carry out terrorist acts within these states. Instead, the jihad of these Muslims would be waged through da'wa, similar to the approach taken by HuT, because they have full freedoms to practice their religion.<sup>64</sup> One way of putting this, as stated by one member, was the belief in jihad of the tongue rather than the sword.<sup>65</sup> In this sense, one should not go to Iraq and Afghanistan to fight or give money to fund terrorist groups abroad, but what they should do is condemn the British government on home soil. In 2004, Bakri acknowledged the divisions within the group, commenting that ALM was divided between da'wa and material jihad, and said he disagreed with the latter because of the covenant of security, thus trying to associate himself with the more non-violent wing of the group.<sup>66</sup>

As can be seen with these various different strands of thought within ALM, it is clear that there were many contradictions in the group's stances on the justification for violence and jihad. It is easy to see how the group lacked coherence when it was disbanded, with internal ideological conflicts causing a significant problem for the group.

Despite claims of non-violence and no association with violence, ALM followers did take part in some terrorist attacks throughout the years. For example, in 2003, two suicide bombers who attacked Mike's Palace Bar in Israel, Asif Hanif and Omar Sharif, were found to be ALM followers. Similarly, in 2014, Abdul Waheed Majid, another follower of ALM, committed a suicide bomb attack in Syria. Obviously, ALM had an effect on followers, whether intentional or not, who would go on to commit violent and terrorist acts.

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<sup>60</sup> Michael Kenney, 'Introduction: Meeting the Emigrants' in *The Islamic State in Britain: Radicalisation and Resilience in an Activist Network*, first edition, Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2018, p. 12.

<sup>61</sup> AP Archive, 'Controversial Meeting of Muslims at Mosque: 12<sup>th</sup> September 2002', [YouTube](#) [online video], 2015.

<sup>62</sup> AP Archive, 2015 (00:37, 01:48).

<sup>63</sup> Richard Watson, 'Al-Muhajiroun and the Long Tail of U.K. Terror', [The New Statesman](#) [online], 2020.

<sup>64</sup> Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 2019, p. 50.

<sup>65</sup> Kenney, 2018, p. 24.

<sup>66</sup> Catherine Raymond, *Al-Muhajiroun and Islam4U.K.: The Group Behind the Ban*. London, U.K.: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR), 2010, p. 6.

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## Al-Muhajiroun and the Islamic State

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The internal debates within ALM on the acceptability of jihad and violence rose to the surface during the 2010s when ISIS had reached the peak of its presence in Syria and Iraq, and on the international stage.

Following Bakri's dissolution of ALM, its network of members remained significant. As mentioned above, splinter groups consisting of former ALM members and leaders continued their work through provocative demonstrations, da'wa, and the use of so-called "media jihad", gaining any attention they could, both good and bad, to their campaigns for a caliphate and shari'a in the United Kingdom.<sup>67</sup> At this time, splinter groups associated with the ALM network were already facing attempts from the police to crack down on their extremist activities and constrict the spread of their ideology.

In 2014, the extremism of the group came to a head when Anjem Choudary, one of the leading members of ALM and a major figure post-Bakri, pledged allegiance to ISIS on behalf of the underground ALM network. This was alongside other sympathisers, such as Mohammed Mizanur Rahman, in a series of videos posted to YouTube, urging Muslims to support the terror group.<sup>68</sup> There are various reasons why he may have done this. After eighteen years of working towards the idea of the caliphate, Choudary and other ALM-linked leaders may have decided that Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, leader of ISIS, had met the necessary requirements to claim legitimacy, and could consider him the leader of all Muslims. In addition, Choudary and others may have felt an obligation to Al-Baghdadi since he had come the closest to establishing the Muslim state since the Ottoman caliphate was abolished in 1924, and may also have believed that Al-Baghdadi was actually legitimate in his actions.

Following Choudary's declaration of allegiance to ISIS, the situation in the U.K. escalated for the ALM network. In September 2014, the police carried out various raids and arrests on ALM linked figures, including Choudary.<sup>69</sup> Some followers of the splinter organisations also fled to Syria with intentions of joining ISIS. In 2016, following this campaign of arrests, Choudary and others were charged with terror offences and were given prison sentences. Various splinter organisations, such as the Sharia Project, were also proscribed during this year. After these events, it seemed that the ALM network had been shut down by the police, albeit there would still be some resilience in the network. All in all, however, Choudary's pledge of allegiance to ISIS and encouraging support for the jihadists' activities dealt a huge blow to the ALM network's ability to operate openly in society.

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<sup>67</sup> Kenney, 2018, pp. 3-4.

<sup>68</sup> Vikram Dodd, 'Anjem Choudary jailed for five and a half years after urging support of ISIS', *The Guardian* [online], 2016.

<sup>69</sup> Kenney, 2018, p. 8.

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## Al-Muhajiroun: What Now?

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In the post-ISIS era, the ALM network has struggled to bounce back as significantly as they had hoped. Since the pledge of allegiance to ISIS and Choudary's conviction, some activists in the ALM network have continued their political and ideological struggle. Many of these "persistent" activists were arrested or became persons of interest to British authorities. Many were put into deradicalization programmes. Now that programmes have been completed, whether they have been effective or not, former ALM members are now free to connect and reengage with the network, but they remain underground and have to be cautious about their activities.<sup>70</sup>

In 2019, ISIS's caliphate was destroyed, and the group is now severely weakened, hiding in the deserts of Syria and Iraq. This does not matter to ALM: the fact that the caliphate was established once means it can be established again. The ALM network is currently in a revival and re-emergence phase, however this is not on a large enough scale to have any kind of effect without a significant influx of new recruits and the persuasion of former members to re-join. Similar to HuT, the ALM network is using "halaqahs"—small, tightly knit, cell-like groups—to coordinate its re-emerging activism and provide a social base for members and prospective followers to expand the network through discussions.<sup>71</sup>

While ALM is beginning to conduct more activity, the network remains less widespread than it was before 2014. Since the latest round of proscriptions concerning splinter ALM organisations, there have been no new replacements in which the group can conduct official activities, and the network remains mostly underground. In 2018, a number of the network's members were released from prison, including Choudary and Usman Khan, who would go on to carry out the London Bridge attack in 2019, stabbing two people to death during a meeting celebrating his "de-radicalization".<sup>72</sup> Security services have continued to monitor the group, as they acknowledge the network's resilience. In one instance, a police raid on an ALM-linked property in Coventry revealed a "significant arms cache" of guns and ammunition, suggesting that some members are prepared to take a more violent approach to activism in the future.<sup>73</sup> This could also be a signal that the network is bigger and making more significant preparations than is widely thought.

Choudary's presence following his arrest and conviction has been less visible. After his 2018 release on license from HMP Belmarsh, he was hampered by many conditions restricting his ability to speak in public, attend certain mosques, and leave his home during certain times. Consequently, Choudary was unable to make public statements and remained silent until 2021. Despite having consistent support from some followers, this had some impact in downgrading his prior influence. The expiration of the license conditions for Choudary's release in 2021, however, has left him free to reengage with former ALM members. Choudary has returned to social media, on the platform Telegram, where he has continued campaigning for extremist Islamism by posting videos, press releases, and statements, especially in support of jailed Islamic extremists such as Bakri. While his channel had around 300 followers in 2021, his posts are being shared widely, with his name being mentioned 43,000 times on Twitter in September and October 2022 alone.<sup>74</sup> This is clear evidence that Choudary's return is stirring up support and he is gaining more and more attention, which can only contribute more to the re-emergence of the ALM network.

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<sup>70</sup> Michael Kenney, *What is To Be Done About al-Muhajiroun? Containing the Emigrants in a Democratic Society*. London, U.K.: Commission for Countering Extremism, 2019, p. 12.

<sup>71</sup> Kenney, 2019, p. 13.

<sup>72</sup> Mark Townsend & Nosheen Iqbal, 'We Don't Understand How Usman Khan Ended Up Like This', *The Guardian* [online], 2019; 'London Bridge: What we know about the attack', *BBC News* [online], 2019.

<sup>73</sup> Townsend & Iqbal, 2019.

<sup>74</sup> Lizzie Dearden, 'Anjem Choudary orchestrating online campaigns in support of extremists despite ISIS conviction', *The Independent* [online], 2021.

Whilst Bakri has not been mentioned a lot in this discussion, and indeed has not been studied much since leaving the U.K. in 2005, he remains an influential figure for ALM in the U.K. Bakri was forced to leave the U.K., or more precisely remain outside the country in Lebanon, following his praise of the 7/7 bombers and the British government's announcement that various Muslim clerics would be investigated. In the years following his departure, Bakri has been arrested various times due to accusations of terrorist links, as well as being involved in the fighting between Shi'a and Sunni Muslims in the region. In 2015, the year after Choudary's arrest, two of Bakri's sons left to join the ranks of ISIS and were killed shortly after in Iraq and Syria.<sup>75</sup> Bakri was then arrested again, eventually being sentenced to six years hard labour for establishing an organisation affiliated with Jabhat al-Nusra.<sup>76</sup>



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<sup>75</sup> Agence France-Presse (AFP), 'Son of Radical Cleric Omar Bakri Believed Killed in Iraq Fighting for ISIS', [The Guardian](#) [online], 2015.

<sup>76</sup> AFP, 2015.

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## Conclusion

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As the report has made clear, HuT and the ALM network have a similar ideological desire to eradicate kufr societies based on the foundations of capitalism, individual liberty, and democracy, and to build in their place a global caliphate that institutes the shari'a. However, as the commentary surrounding the assassination attempt against Salman Rushdie in August demonstrates, even within extremist Islamist circles, there are differences and nuances in perspectives and justifications for the use of violence to achieve goals. While HuT officially does not support the use of force in pursuit of the caliphate, ALM's activity has been intertwined with the use of violence and force. HuT evidently has varying levels of sympathy towards the use of violence by Muslims in differing countries, time-periods, and contexts, notably Syria and Afghanistan, but this is distinct from ALM swearing allegiance to ISIS.





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## APPENDIX A: Hizb ut-Tahrir in Afghanistan

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In contrast to the long history of HuT in Syria, the movement is relatively new in terms of presence in Afghanistan. HuT has been operating informally in Afghanistan since 2003.<sup>77</sup> The intervention of NATO to topple the Taliban regime that sheltered the 9/11 killers created and protected democratic governance in Afghanistan, until the disastrous decision to withdraw in 2021,<sup>78</sup> and this was the environment HuT entered into.

The Afghan branch of HuT always had an anti-government position, as their ideology opposes the presence of “colonial” powers and kufr governments in Muslim states, describing the Afghan democratic government as a puppet of the U.S.<sup>79</sup> The group’s stance rejecting democracy also ensured their opposition to the Afghan government.

In February 2021, after years of HuT activity in Afghanistan and a generally passive approach from the government, then-Vice President Amrullah Saleh stated that the state did not recognise the group.<sup>80</sup> Therefore, its membership and activities, including gatherings and protests, were illegal in the eyes of the government, with the party being described as “likeminded” to terrorist groups such as the Taliban and the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP).<sup>81</sup> After the NATO withdrawal collapsed the elected Afghan government and allowed the Taliban and Al-Qaeda takeover in August 2022, HuT congratulated the “Afghan people” on its victory over the “oppressors” and called for the establishment of an Islamic state to replace the “puppet regime”.<sup>82</sup> With the Taliban now having assumed control, HuT do not want them to make concessions to outside powers and interests, but instead use this opportunity to begin building the global Muslim caliphate.

During the entirety of HuT’s presence in Afghanistan, the party have spread propaganda in favour of their mission to build an Islamic state. HuT’s anti-Afghan government rhetoric was consistent with its approach in many other states, as was its attempt to use Islamist teachings and literature to indoctrinate new members. Distributing leaflets, literature, and encouraging debates, HuT actively recruited in Afghanistan. Specifically, members have targeted Afghan youth and those in education, as well as those in uneducated and rural areas. Rather than invoking ethnic or tribal identity to persuade prospective members, HuT has relied more on shared grievances against the government and concerns for the wider global umma.<sup>83</sup> The party has built a presence in higher education institutions such as universities and has even garnered support in both student and staff populations.<sup>84</sup> These educational environments have facilitated debates and conversations about HuT ideology, providing a chance for prospective members to engage with ideas before they even join.

Furthermore, HuT has been present in Afghan religious settings, such as mosques, utilising the opportunity for discussion amongst religious peers and leaders. The focus on anti-government rhetoric worked to increase recruitment during a time when dissatisfaction with the government was growing. Scandals over corruption and fraud within the democratic governments were manipulated and amplified to fuel negative feeling and anti-democratic sentiment.<sup>85</sup> One piece of HuT propaganda described the government as corrupt and

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<sup>77</sup> Farzed Ramenazi Bonesh, ‘Hizb ut-Tahrir: A Growing Threat in Afghanistan’, *European Eye on Radicalisation* [online] (2020).

<sup>78</sup> Oved Lobel, ‘The Graveyard of Empires: The Causes and Consequences of American Withdrawal from Afghanistan’, *European Eye on Radicalization*, 2021, pp. 52-55.

<sup>79</sup> Hizb ut-Tahrir, ‘Hizb ut-Tahrir Afghanistan Congratulates the People of Afghanistan and the Whole Islamic Ummah on the Conclusion of American and NATO Occupation’, *Hizb ut-Tahrir Afghanistan* [online], 2021.

<sup>80</sup> Zahra Rahimi, ‘Saleh Calls for End to Hizb ut-Tahrir Activity in Afghanistan’, *Tolo News* [online], 2021.

<sup>81</sup> Rahimi, 2021.

<sup>82</sup> Hizb ut-Tahrir, 2021.

<sup>83</sup> Reza Fazli et al, *Special Report 379: Understanding and Countering Violent Extremism in Afghanistan*. Washington D.C., USA: United States Institute for Peace, 2015, p. 5.

<sup>84</sup> Fazli et al, 2015, p. 10.

<sup>85</sup> Borhan Osman, ‘Afghan Youth for Democracy? Not All of Them’, *Afghanistan Analysts Network* [online], 2014.

“protecting themselves from any prosecutions”.<sup>86</sup> In similar pieces that HuT publish, no matter what the issue is, there is an emphasis on the fact that the implementation of Islamic law is the only solution to bring the corruption of democratic systems and capitalism to an end. Then there is the ideological importance of the umma’s “responsibility” to perform peaceful jihad and create intellectual change. Just as they do in other countries, HuT in Afghanistan also relies heavily on the use of media and online platforms to discuss topics and frame issues at local levels. This helps to play on the grievances of communities with the government and promote the vision of the Islamic state.<sup>87</sup>

Not only have HuT used propaganda as their main methodology in Afghanistan, but the party also has various connections with jihadists and warlords in the region. HuT’s central message concerning a peaceful jihad remains the same in Afghanistan as it is throughout the larger movement. Members pursue the Islamic state through conversation, using force only as a last resort to remove a kufr government. The important distinction that HuT makes is between jihad, sanctioned only by the Caliph, and resistance against control by foreign invaders. In denouncing and resisting the democratic Afghan government, HuT adhered to this line of thinking, allowing more leeway for violence in Afghanistan. Despite the focus on non-violent resistance against kufr ideology, Afghanistan’s HuT has faced accusations from the government of working with terrorist groups, both the Taliban/Al-Qaeda and ISKP, to conduct political assassinations and help with recruitment in youth-oriented spaces.<sup>88</sup> While there may be a small number of HuT members that sympathise and defect to more violent groups, the official position of the party is not sympathetic with the widescale violence.

Since the Taliban takeover, HuT has said the jihadists seeking recognition from the international community is unnecessary. However, it goes further than this. In the eyes of HuT, the actions of outside powers in attempting to keep the Taliban’s leadership of Afghanistan as illegitimate are perceived by HuT to be efforts to prevent the establishment of the Islamic state, the most important goal.<sup>89</sup> Similarly, HuT object to the demand of outside states that the Taliban contain their activities within Afghanistan’s borders. HuT argue that the Islamic state cannot be contained to one state and should be expanded to the rest of the Muslim world, before moving to the West. The Taliban has not proven immensely receptive. Despite the ambiguities over the Taliban’s own territorial ambitions, the Taliban has not welcomed advice from HuT and has stated in the past that they would take action against HuT members and cells if they felt threatened by the group.<sup>90</sup> Unfortunately for HuT, this has already taken place, with the Taliban having already arrested party members for their association with the group and for preaching.<sup>91</sup> This makes it clear that HuT are still considered an illegal entity, despite the transfer of power, and suggests the two groups are not cooperating with each other in pursuit of a larger cause.

In spite of this, there are other groups that HuT is connected that operate in the region, and who the party has both negative and positive links with.

One group that HuT can be linked to is Hizb an-Nusra (HaN), otherwise known as the Party of Assistance/Support. HaN was founded in 1999 by a group of HuT members who broke away from the central group.<sup>92</sup> This faction has been operational in both Afghanistan and Uzbekistan and is the result of methodological division in HuT. A significant swathe of members were reported as becoming dissatisfied and impatient with HuT’s non-violent methods, including the focus on spreading propaganda and the intellectual struggle.<sup>93</sup> These individuals were ready for a more violent jihad that they believed would be more effective

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<sup>86</sup> Hizb ut-Tahrir, ‘People are Dying of Coronavirus and Poverty, and the Afghan Government is Looting Their Shrouds!’, [Hizb ut-Tahrir Afghanistan](#) [online], 2020.

<sup>87</sup> Fazli et al, 2015, p. 12.

<sup>88</sup> Bonesh, 2020.

<sup>89</sup> Farzed Ramenazi Bonesh, ‘Afghanistan’s Hizb ut-Tahrir, Taliban and ISIS-K’, [Albawaba](#) [online], 2021.

<sup>90</sup> Bonesh, 2021.

<sup>91</sup> 8am, ‘Taliban Arrests Hizb ut-Tahrir Members in Takhar’, [Hasht e-Subh Daijy](#) [online], 2022.

<sup>92</sup> Zeyno Baran, ‘Radical Islamists in Central Asia’. *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, 2005, Volume 2, p. 48.

<sup>93</sup> International Crisis Group, *The IMU and Hizb ut-Tahrir: Implications of the Afghanistan Campaign*. Brussels, Belgium: ICG, 2002, p. 9.

in removing kufr governments from Central Asia and establishing the Muslim caliphate.<sup>94</sup> Apart from this, there are still some similarities that HaN shares with HuT. HaN still requires new members to undergo an induction process over six months, which involves studying Islamic literature and becoming knowledgeable in the System of Islam.<sup>95</sup> Rather than recruiting just anyone, however, HaN screens prospective members and investigates backgrounds of possible members, practicing a much more selective and discriminatory recruitment process. Overall, HaN has maintained much of the same ideology as HuT, yet it retains much more control over its membership, adopts secretive practices, and favours more aggressive methods of jihad than HuT. The only downside to looking at the connection between these two groups is that there is not much information on HaN that has been published any later than the 2000s, and it is unclear whether they are still operating at a similar level today.

Another group that HuT can be connected to in Afghanistan is Hizb-i Islami (HI). The group is an Islamist political party that was founded in 2004 as a non-violent splinter from Hezb e-Islami Gulbuddin,<sup>96</sup> perhaps the most powerful and certainly the most radical of the Mujahideen groups created by Pakistan in the early 1970s for war against the Afghan government who were later repurposed for use against the Soviet Union after the Red Army occupied Afghanistan in 1979.<sup>97</sup> While HuT also refers to itself as an Islamist political party, there is a big difference between the two groups. HI is a “participationist” political party, involved in political systems and elections. HuT, also in its self-conception a political party, rejects all of this—indeed, all “human made” ideological concepts and systems of governance, such as capitalism and democracy. The two groups are, however, ideologically similar in their mission. Both groups seek to establish an Islamic state built on strict societal structures and governed by leader surrounded by a small number of educated elites.<sup>98</sup> Although there is difference in vision on the size of the Islamic state, with HuT wanting a global Muslim caliphate and HI striving for an Afghan Islamic state, there is clearly an alignment of ideology and interest between the two, even if direct connections are difficult to detect since HuT is still a proscribed organisation.

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<sup>94</sup> Didier Chaudet, ‘Hizb ut-Tahrir: An Islamic Threat to Central Asia’, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 2006, Volume 26, Issue 1, p. 122.

<sup>95</sup> Baran, 2005, p. 48.

<sup>96</sup> ISW, ‘Hizb-i-Islami Gulbuddin (HIG)’. *Institute for the Study of War* (ISW) [online], 2022.

<sup>97</sup> Lobel, 2021, pp. 10-11.

<sup>98</sup> ISW, 2022.